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Embalming Ebenezer



Herbert P. Powell

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Embalming Ebenezer

An Ethiopian Farce in One Scene

By
HERBERT P. POWELL



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Embalming Ebenezer

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Embalming Ebenezer

CHARACTERS

- EBENEZER ROSENSTEIN . . . *bosom companion and sometime
friend of Hardupp*
HORACE HARDUPP . . . *who is planning to "get-rich-
quick"*
DR. GEORGE WASHINGTON STONEWALL
JACKSON *an insurance agent*

TIME OF PLAYING.—Fifteen minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Horace Hardupp has spent his friend Ebenezer's "las' two quahtahs" for an insurance policy in his own favor. There is one flaw in his scheme, however:—Ebenezer "ain't got no notion of dying, not no notion." But when the agent, already informed by Horace of Ebenezer's death, comes in, he plays the corpse, with some expostulations, however. Jackson questions Horace about the deceased and then proceeds to embalm the "corpse." Horace goes to get some ice, leaving Ebenezer to the tender mercies of Dr. Jackson. A screamingly funny scene ensues, in which Dr. Jackson swells what seems to be Ebenezer's head until it bursts. The poison which the Doctor had poured into the glass having disappeared while his back was turned, he decides that "de sperrits done got him." When he gets a vision of Ebenezer in a sheet he is fully convinced and flees in terror, leaving Ebenezer master of the situation and of the insurance money.

COSTUMES, ETC.

EBENEZER ROSENSTEIN. Twenty-five. Shabby, ill-fitting coat and trousers.

HORACE HARDUPP. Twenty-five. Much more sporty and better-fitting clothes, red tie and spotted vest.

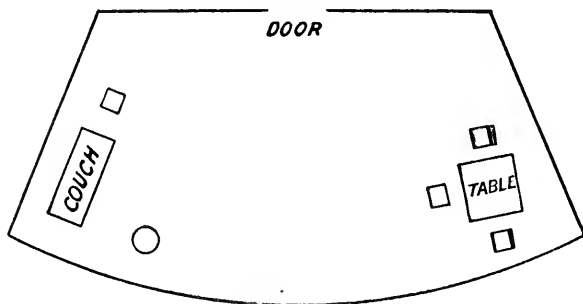
DR. JACKSON. Grandly arrayed in Prince Albert, gray trousers, tan shoes, white spats and silk hat.

PROPERTIES

Razor and folded paper, supposed to be insurance policy, for Hardupp. For Jackson, suit-case, can labeled "Poison," legal document, fountain pen, meat-cleaver, knife, potato masher, bicycle pump, toy balloon, tumbler, syringe, cigar, money, a collection of tools. Sheet on couch.

SCENE PLOT

INTERIOR BACKING



SCENE.—Room of Horace and Ebenezer. Door up c. ; table down L. ; chairs on each side of table ; cot or couch down R. ; cuspidor in front of couch ; chair at head of couch.

Embalming Ebenezer

SCENE.—*Room of* HORACE HARDUPP *and* EBENEZER ROSENSTEIN. (*See Scene Plot.*) EBENEZER *is sitting dejectedly in the chair by the table, facing the audience.*

EBENEZER. Wha' am dat niggah, anyways? Heah it am t'ree days since Ah laid mah eyes on him,—an' de same len'th ob time sence Ah see de las' remaindah of mah eahn-in's, what he done tuk along. Oh, de frien' ob mah bosom, de companion ob mah trust, tuhned traitah, done lef' me to stahve, while he's spohtin' hisse'f at Atlantic City (*local resort*) wif mah cash. Jes' wait tel Ah kotch dat niggah! (*Door opens and HORACE strides in triumphantly waving "policy."* EBENEZER *makes for him.*) Wheah am mah cash, you good-foh-nothin' black stove-pipe?

HORACE (*less exuberant*). Now, Ebenezer, jes' lemme explain.

EBENEZER. You cain't 'splain stealin' mah las' two quahtahs!

HORACE. Look heah what Ah done buyed! This'll make me a rich man;—if you'll jes' lemme talk a minnit —

EBENEZER. Go on an' talk. I ain't int'ruptin' you. Go on, talk, talk, talk!

HORACE. Well, you see, it was dissaway —

EBENEZER. An', believe me, you got some talkin' to do.

HORACE. By havin' your life insured, I —

EBENEZER. Say, is you 'ware dat food has been a total strainger to mah stomach foh two whole days?

HORACE. I'se 'ware dat if you keep on interpolruptin' me, it'll take two days to 'splain dis proposition through your billiard ball of a head.

EBENEZER. An', furthermore, does you know dat if Ah

ever does have de good fortune to eat one more time on dis earth, Ah'll have to swallow a crow-bar fust?

HORACE. For what?

EBENEZER. So as to pry my stomach away from mah backbone, dat's why.

HORACE. Say, is you gonna lemme 'splain dis matter, or is you ain't? Dat's all Ah axe you; is you is, or is you ain't?

EBENEZER. If you can' 'splain mah las' two quahtahs from mah eager fingers to mah entire satisfaction, you is some or-a-tor.

HORACE. All Ah ask is a chance.

EBENEZER. All Ah ask is one lone chance at dat fifty cents.

HORACE. You see, it was dissaway —

EBENEZER. One, single, solitary chance is all I request.

HORACE. — I has had your life insured —

EBENEZER. Another thing; why did my life have to be insured? Why not your life?

HORACE. Because I'm in no danger of death.

EBENEZER. You're in danger of death every time I think of my las' fifty cents.

HORACE (*ignoring the thrust*). As de matter now stands, when you dies, de insurance company gives you —

EBENEZER (*still suspicious*). Don't hesitate,—de insurance company gives me what?

HORACE. A full military funeral.

EBENEZER (*sarcastically*). A full military funeral is a lot o' comfort to a starvin' corpse, now ain't it?

HORACE. And de insurance company gives me —
(*He takes insurance policy out of his pocket and reads.*)
"Ten dollars if you're burned up at home; twenty-five dollars if you're burned up in jail; and fifty dollars if you're burned up in a railroad wreck."

EBENEZER. I thought you said dat was a life insurance policy?

HORACE. Dat's right.

EBENEZER. You fool coon, dat's a fire insurance policy.

HORACE. Well, is everything clear to you now?

EBENEZER. Yes, I can see through it as easy as a brick wall.

HORACE. Why, coon, de scheme is perfect,—as perfect as a diamond.

EBENEZER. Horace, dat li'l diamond of yours has got a flaw in it as big as your head.

HORACE. Point it out to me, Ebenezer.

EBENEZER. I ain't got no notion of dying, not no notion.

HORACE (*exasperated*). Look me in the eye, Ebenezer Rosenstein, an' answer me dis. Would you let a little thing like your life mar our friendship?

EBENEZER. I would, I would; you know very well I would.

HORACE. You looka here, nigga. I has done notified de agent dat you died dis mornin', an' I expecks him any minnit to come and view de remains, an' pay me.

EBENEZER. Only, when Mr. Agent comes, there will be no remains.

HORACE (*confidently*). When de agent comes, you is gwine ter be layin' on dat 'ere couch dead. (EBENEZER *shudders*.) Stone dead! (*More shudders*.)

EBENEZER. Dawgone if I don't believe you loss your mind.

HORACE. You de one dat loss your mind. Don't you understand dat you jus' makes out you is dead? Den, after de agent pays me an' goes away, I pays you —

EBENEZER (*interested for the first time*). Don't stop!

HORACE. I pays you your fifty cents back, an' —

EBENEZER (*disgusted again*). You don't tell me!

HORACE. Now, what's wrong wid you?

EBENEZER. You got more gall. You takes my fifty cents. Leaves me hungry; takes chances wid my well being, an' all I gets out of it is a little excitement, an' my same ole fifty cents back again.

HORACE. Well, if you ain't de mos' disagreeable nigga. A minute ago you was yellin' de top of your head off 'cause I taken your two quahtahs, an' now here you is complainin' 'cause I'm gonna give 'em back to you. (*Knock is heard at the door*.) Dere's de insurance man now, Ebenezer. Lay down an' die quick.

EBENEZER. I stan' as much chance of layin' down dere as a snowball in —

(*Knock cuts off the rest of the sentence.*)

HORACE (*pulling out a wicked looking razor*). Is it gonna be necessary for me to persuade you to lay down on dat 'ere ccuch?

EBENEZER (*lying down*). I see I gotta die one way or another. (*Knock heard again.*)

HORACE (*sitting on EBENEZER's legs*). Come in.

(*Enter DR. JACKSON, with a suit-case in one hand, and in the other a can labeled "Poison."*)

JACKSON. Ah, brudder, I wishes to offer you my condolences in your sad bereavement.

HORACE. Yassuh. Same to you, suh, an' many of 'em.

JACKSON. Are you sittin' up wid de corpse?

EBENEZER (*rising to sitting position*). Naw, he's sittin' up on de corpse.

(*HORACE pushes his face and makes him lie down again, then gets up hurriedly and stands in front of EBENEZER.*)

JACKSON. What's dat?

HORACE. I said, don't he look natural?

(*Stands at the head of the couch.*)

JACKSON. Hum, before I can deliver the money, I has to fill in de death cerstificate. (*He sits at table with back to the couch and pulls out from his pocket large document and fountain pen.*) First, what was his name?

HORACE. Ebenezer Rosenstein.

JACKSON. Rosenstein is a Jew name.

HORACE. Ebenezer was a Jew nigger.

(*EBENEZER sits up indignantly and HORACE promptly throws him down.*)

JACKSON. Born —

HORACE. Oh, yassuh.

JACKSON. What?

HORACE. I say, yassuh he was born.

JACKSON. I means, what's his age?

HORACE. Oh! (*To EBENEZER.*) How old is you?

EBENEZER. Six and seven-eights, my nex' birthday.

HORACE. Six an' seven-eights.

JACKSON. Dat's his hat.

HORACE. Well, dat's what he told me before he died.

JACKSON. Count his teeth.

(*HORACE sits on EBENEZER's stomach and counts his teeth.*)

HORACE (*turning to JACKSON*). Twenty-six on his mother's side.

(*He allows his finger to stay in EBENEZER's mouth, and EBENEZER bites it hard. HORACE jumps up with a yell.*)

JACKSON (*jumping*). What's de matter wid you, nigger?

HORACE. I got rheumatism in my finger.

JACKSON. Hum! Lemme see! Oh, yes, what was de cause of his death?

EBENEZER (*sitting up*). We needed de money.

(HORACE *pulls him down.*)

JACKSON. You what?

HORACE. I said—uh—dat he—uh—dat he et too much honey. Yassuh, he et too much honey.

JACKSON. I see, overeating.

(*At that insult, EBENEZER jumps off the couch and runs over to table. HORACE, in despair, takes EBENEZER's place on the couch. JACKSON is busy at the desk and does not see this.*)

EBENEZER. You stewed hunk of shoe-blackening, don't you kid me. Overeating your big foot. I ain't et for two days or nights. (*Goes up c.*)

JACKSON. I ain't axe when is you et. I'se talking 'bout de deceased.

(EBENEZER *notices what HORACE has done.*)

EBENEZER. Oh, sure! You mean corpsie.

JACKSON (*looking at EBENEZER, up c.*). Eggsackly.

EBENEZER. Oh, yeah. What was you sayin'?

JACKSON. I asked, what did he die of?

EBENEZER. He died of a Tuesday night.

JACKSON. Hum, did he leave a wife?

EBENEZER. Yeah, every night.

JACKSON. Hum, did he belong to de army of de Lord?

EBENEZER. Naw, suh, he belonged to de navy.

JACKSON. To de navy?

EBENEZER. Yassuh, he was a Baptist.

(JACKSON *laughs heartily at the joke, and EBENEZER conceitedly struts over to couch, R., chuckling. HORACE nabs him and pulls him back on the couch.*)

JACKSON. Well, here's de money. (*Counts bills.*) Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty.

(HORACE goes up L.)

HORACE. Oh, thank you, suh.

(*He reaches for money, but JACKSON, as though on second thought, withholds it.*)

JACKSON. Oh, I nearly forgot. I'se got to embalm him. (*Busy again at desk.*)

(EBENEZER sits up on couch. HORACE rushes R. to him.)

EBENEZER. You gotta do what?

(HORACE sits down on him.)

HORACE. What is embalming?

JACKSON. Making sure he's dead. If he ain't exactly dead now, he will be when I gets through with him. Dat prevents his being buried alive.

HORACE (*looking down at EBENEZER*). Well, we won't ask you to go to all that trouble. (*Gets up off EBENEZER.*)

JACKSON. I gotta. It's a rule of our company. No embalming, no money.

HORACE (*considering a minute*). Oh, well, it matters not to me. Go on an' embalm him. I must have de money. (*JACKSON opens the suit-case down L., his back to couch, and dumps an assortment of hardware on the table.* HORACE, C.) Why the tools?

(EBENEZER sits up.)

JACKSON. I has to use every one of dese on him.

EBENEZER. He couldn't touch me wid a feather duster.

(HORACE goes R. and pushes him down. JACKSON is on knees, down L., taking things from suit-case.)

JACKSON. Huh, brudder, take this two-buck note an' get me some ice.

HORACE (*going L., takes the proffered bill*). What you want ice for, Doc?

JACKSON. Why, as I cuts him apart, we can fill him up wid ice an' preserve him.

HORACE. Science is a great thing. (*He walks to door, c.*)
Say, Doc.

JACKSON. Yes, brudder?

HORACE. Save his gizzard for me, will you?

JACKSON. Suttinly, brudder, suttinly. (*Exit HORACE, up c. JACKSON rises, takes off his coat; walks over to couch and looks at EBENEZER reflectively, scratching his chin.*) Lemme see. The first thing is to blow his brains out. (*Walks over to table and picks up large bicycle pump. Goes back to couch and attaches pump to the tube of a toy balloon which is concealed under EBENEZER's wig. EBENEZER's head is toward audience. JACKSON begins pumping and balloon swells up through opening in wig, apparently being a boil on EBENEZER's head. JACKSON pumps until the balloon bursts. He goes back to table, L. EBENEZER sits up and feels head. JACKSON picks up the can labeled "Poison," and fills tumbler. EBENEZER lies down again. JACKSON places tumbler on chair at head of couch and walks back to table. EBENEZER picks up tumbler, smells it and pours contents into cuspidor and lies down again. JACKSON walks to couch and is astonished to find the tumbler empty.*) Now, I thought sho' I'd filled dat 'ere glass wid dat 'ere poison. (*He goes back to table and refills glass with liquid, places glass on chair by couch and carries can back to table, L. EBENEZER pours the second glass into the cuspidor also. JACKSON returns to chair to find glass empty. He picks up the glass and turns it upside down to make sure. Looks at EBENEZER curiously.*) Well, I guess I'll have to shoot it into him. (*He gets a large syringe, sticks it into the can and fills it with the fluid. Places the syringe in EBENEZER's mouth and shoves the plunger down. EBENEZER promptly squirts the water up into JACKSON's face. JACKSON is blinded. He splutters and waves his hands wildly. EBENEZER rolls off on R. side of couch, coughing and spitting. JACKSON goes to table, L., and picks up meat-cleaver. When he goes to couch and finds it empty he is thoroughly frightened.*) Oh, my land! De sperrits done got him! (*He turns and gets his coat off chair. EBENEZER gets up and lies down on couch, L. JACKSON starts to run off, but draws up suddenly, discovering EBENEZER.*) Well, I be dawgone! (*He feels EBENEZER, doubtingly.*) It's him, all right. (*He whistles, goes to table, L., lays his coat back over chair. EBENEZER gets up, throws sheet over head and*

goes up L., behind JACKSON, who again picks up meat-cleaver. JACKSON walks to couch to find that EBENEZER is again missing. EBENEZER stands up L.) Oh, my golly! He's gone again.

(EBENEZER emits a hollow groan. JACKSON shudders. EBENEZER groans again and moves down R., back of JACKSON. JACKSON's teeth chatter and his legs quake. The cleaver drops from his nerveless fingers, and his hand gropes behind him. He is terrified on coming in contact with the sheet. He feels it, his hand slowly creeping upwards. Turns and sees the ghostly sheet, and with a shriek falls backwards over the couch; gets up and with another look exits hurriedly, C. EBENEZER takes off the sheet, puts on JACKSON's coat and silk hat. Counts the bills which lie on the table.)

EBENEZER. Huh! Fifty dollars. I'll let Horace keep them two quahtabs. (He rolls up bills and puts them in his pocket. Takes cigar from pocket of JACKSON's coat, lights it, and takes two long puffs. Sets the silk hat on his head.) Well, I always did think I'd make an elegant corpse.

(Clears his throat grandly and walks proudly to door.)

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